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Policy integration in the shaping of organic food as strategy in the Danish food sector – what happened to the environmental concern as driving force

The paper discusses the mechanisms in the shaping of organic food as strategy in the Danish food sector based on an analysis of the development since the 1980'ies as a contribution to the discussion of strategies for sustainable transition and the role of different policy strategies, including policy integration, herein . The background of the paper is the major achievements with organic food in Denmark since the 1980'ies, but also the recent reduction in the increase of land being converted to organic farming.

The analysis is based on Karnøe's and Garud's approach for analyses of the creation of new technological fields, which sees such creation as a combination of path creation and path dependency. The focus is on the shaping of new institutions, structures, new knowledge fields and on the re-use and re-shaping of existing institutions, structures etc. These processes have involved an ongoing interaction between production, consumption/use, knowledge and regulation, where these systems constantly are co-shaping each other.

Policy processes has played and still plays a major role in the development of organic food production in Denmark. This includes private regulation via different policy networks, national governmental regulation and international regulation, especially within the European Community (EU). Also the regulation of the conventional farming has played and plays a role in the shaping of organic food. (Schot et al, 2001) describes three different governance paradigms. All of them have been seen as part of the direct regulation of organic food production:

Classical steering paradigm with a central role for government and hierarchical relations: a law on organic farming, including a certification scheme with an organic control label

Market based model based on financial incentives: a national support scheme for conversion of farms and companies, national support scheme for research and development, including public green procurement

Policy networks based on interactions among actors in which information and resources are exchanged: a national council for organic food, the development of national Action Plans and demonstration projects

The regulation of organic food was quite early based on policy integration, since the governmental regulation was organised within the ministry for food and agriculture. This might be seen as a follow up to the development of plans for sustainable development within

several ministries in Denmark, including the ministry for food and agriculture. Denmark was the first country to introduce a national support scheme for organic farming and for research and development (1988) based on a law on organic farming (1987). The idea was to generate consumer confidence in organic food. It was agreed that there was a need for developing the supply and demand of organic food further. Therefore the scope of the support scheme for organic farming was extended, so that it also covered support for development of new organic food products. Activities for the development of the demand for organic food was also supported, e.g. campaigns for organic food by one of the retail chains and public procurement by support to the development of strategies for the usage of organic food in public institutions, hospitals etc.

The development has also shown limits to policy integration. Denmark has a long tradition for agricultural advisers organised by the farmers' associations. When organic farming started getting more widespread in the 1980 it became clear that there was a need for advice on organic farming. However, it became clear that the existing agricultural advising system was so much integrated into the conventional agriculture and its use of artificial fertiliser, pesticides etc. and had co-operation with the suppliers of these products that it was necessary to have dedicated organic agricultural advisers. Later on, co-operation between the two groups of advisers was organised.

The main strategy for the development of organic food as a strategy has been the market-based approach, while the focus has not been on the organic as an environmental strategy in relation to the environmental topics, which are discussed in Denmark: cleaner ground water, reduced eutrofication of streams, lakes and seas and safeguarding the biodiversity. Today organic food is seen by the ministries for food and agriculture and the conventional food industry and retailers as a strategic product niche and not as an environmental strategy for the conventional agriculture. When the Danish parliament implemented some European Community subsidies for environmental friendly farming, defined as a reduction of the use of pesticides and fertiliser, the organic farming organisation had to 'work hard' to get organic farming accepted as an eligible strategy, although it does not use pesticides. This shows how the shaping of the general governmental regulation of agriculture also is shaping the role of organic farming as a possible environmental strategy. In stead of seeing organic farming as an environmental strategy the strategy has been an environmental optimisation of the conventional farming.

References: Schot J et al. 2001 Transition to Sustainability through System Innovations. Keynote paper for an International Expert Meeting, Version September 2001